

Testimony before the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement
On HB 6403: An Act Requiring Legislative Approval for the Merger or Closing of Institutions
Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Submitted by Lillian Maisfehl, MLIS
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and Staff Chair of Faculty/Staff Council
Gateway Community College
March 9, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines, and Members of the committee. My name is Lillian Maisfehl. I am a Reference & Instruction Librarian and the Information Literacy Coordinator at Gateway Community College. I am also staff chair of Gateway's Faculty/Staff Council and co-chair of the Information Literacy Expert Team of the CSCU Library Consortium.

I am testifying in support of HB 6403.

I have been at Gateway for nearly seventeen years, and fortune willing, I intend to remain there until I retire. It is just that special a place. Each day I am amazed anew by the intelligence, the compassion, the dedication, the creativity, the humanity of my friends and colleagues among the faculty and staff, and each day I am inspired by the resilience, the determination, the brilliance, the wit of our students. We truly are a community of educators, scholars, innovators and dreamers, and I am fiercely proud of my part in that community.

The Board of Regents for Higher Education's plan to consolidate the twelve Connecticut community colleges runs counter to the spirit in which I and my colleagues approach our work. The BOR presents a highly centralized, top-down, management-heavy model in which faculty, staff, and student voices are distant and muted, if they reach the Regents' ear at all.

Community colleges are the institutions of higher learning that do the most for those who have the least, and they are slowly but inexorably being eroded in Connecticut as the BOR operates with no oversight or accountability. I urge you to pass HB 6403 with the following substitute language:

The proposed bill states that if the legislature does not act within a year, a proposed merger or closure will be deemed approved. I recommend that be changed to *not* approved. In addition, I recommend adding the clause "that the BOR shall not seek regional accreditation for a merger that has not been approved by the General Assembly."

The heart of a college is the people who work, teach, and learn there. Community colleges in particular must be sensitive to the needs of the community they serve, and faculty and staff work closely with students, many of whom are first-generation or struggle with academic or financial burdens that would prevent them from attending a four-year college. We believe in open access to all, and to creating the

support structures to help students succeed, according to *their* academic or career aspirations or needs. We know our students. We need support, not layers of Gogolian bureaucracy or expensive consultants. I urge you to pass HB 6403, and provide critically needed oversight on a Board of Regents that has come to operate in an information echo chamber, making decisions uncritically and without consideration for the voices of those most impacted by those decisions. Our students deserve better. Our state deserves better. We can do better.

Thank you,

The image shows a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lillian Maisfehl". To the right of the signature is a circular seal. The seal has a blue outer ring with white text, a red inner ring with white text, and a white center with a red number "12".

Lillian Maisfehl